

area in this wetland. The sighting of an adult grey-headed lapwing from Kerala assumes significance as Ali and Ripley (1987) give the southern most distribution range as north Bihar. They also state that "a large proportion of our visitors are young birds without pectoral band".

July 9, 1999

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11. FEEDING HABITS OF THE WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER *HALCYON SMYRNENSIS* (LINN.) FAMILY ALCEDINIDAE

The white-breasted kingfisher is well known for its versatile food and feeding habits (Ali and Ripley 1970, Mukherjee 1975, Yahya and Yasmeen 1991, Knowles and Nitchen 1995). However, it was quite interesting to observe three white-breasted kingfishers join a mixed hunting party of insectivores and hunt with them.

On June 18, 1999, I was following a mixed hunting party near Muthanga in Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala (11° 35'-11° 55' N and 76° 02'-76° 27' E). The Sanctuary is dominated by Moist Deciduous Forest with thick bamboo groves at many places. The Muthanga Forest Range of this Sanctuary adjoins the Bandipur (Karnataka) and Mudumalai (Tamil Nadu) National Parks at a place called Trijunction. After good rainfall in the morning, several species of birds were feeding in a teak (*Tectona grandis*) dominated patch of the forest. The party included the greater racket-tailed drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*), bronzed drongo (*D. aeneus*) common woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*), Loten's sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia*), gold-fronted chloropsis (*Chloropsis aurifrons*), white-cheeked barbet (*Megalaima viridis*), scarlet minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), velvet-fronted nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*), lesser golden-backed woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) and several species of warblers. The

birds were moving from one area to another in a typical wave (Yahya 1990) of insectivores. It was still cloudy and windy at 1240 hrs, when I heard the calls of a white-breasted kingfisher among the birds, and on scanning the flock, found that three birds had joined the party.

The kingfishers, perched above and below the teak foliage, made frequent sallies like any other fly-catching bird, and hunted with the party for the next 90 minutes. During this period, they also called frequently. In fact, it was their typical loud calls *kilililia kilililia* ... which first attracted my attention. Initially, I thought the white-breasted kingfisher had just appeared on the scene, and may have some other interest in the area (such as a nest), but their constant following and hunting with the party demonstrated their expertise as insectivores. I have never seen this species following a mixed hunting party before, nor is any such record available in the literature. One of our research scholars, Sajeev T.K, in Anaimalai Hills, also saw this phenomenon recently.

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12. LARGE GREY BABBLER (*TURDOIDES MALCOLMI*) TRAPPED FOR THE TABLE

It was not surprising to find the large grey babbler *Turdoides malcolmi* (Sykes) listed as a bird that needs conservation, in a brochure issued by the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh. The present status of this species, which is described as common in Deccan Plateau, now calls for its conservation. Factors that have contributed to its destruction in Deccan Plateau cannot be analysed here, but one of the major factors, which might have lead to its decline in Chhattisgarh State, is intensive trapping. The large grey babbler is commonly served instead of quail in roadside hotels, as the incident related below will confirm.

One of my junior officers had brought a bagful of quail. Luckily, before his departure, the

so-called quail were examined, and to our utmost surprise, they were in fact large grey babblers tied in bunches by the legs. Their tail feathers had been pulled out and wings broken. The birds were photographed and later released into the bush.

Large grey babblers are commonly sold and served as quail, and customers in their ignorance, relish the babblers. No helping hand has come forward to save them.

April 7, 1999

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13. MALABAR WHISTLING-THRUSH *MYIOPHONUS HORSFIELDII*
IN THE GIR FORESTS, SAURASHTRA, GUJARAT

A Malabar whistling-thrush *Myiophonus horsfieldii* (Vigors) was seen continuously for a week from April 7 to 15, 1998 in the Gir Forests, Saurashtra. It used to arrive at a spot on the riverbed near Nanava Ness at around 0700 hrs daily, and feed on insects off cow dung, river cliffs, riverbed, dry leaves, humus and on the bark of trees. It was not shy and allowed observers to approach even to about 3 m. When disturbed, it flew away, uttering a low whistle. The thrush was easily identified by its blue black colour, glistening cobalt blue on the forehead and shoulders, and its black bill and legs. The bird

was photographed for record.

The northernmost record of the Malabar whistling-thrush is south Rajasthan and its presence in the Gir is an extension of its range into the Saurashtra peninsula. Its occurrence in the dry deciduous forests of the Gir is also an unusual change from the usual habitat of Evergreen and Moist Deciduous Forests.

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